

Please Vote

Soon you will be receiving (or have received) your ballot for the current AMS elections. The Web-based instructions or your paper ballot will contain much information concerning the candidates for elected positions and also an additional issue, namely the implementation of an AMS Fellows Program. Each year all AMS members have the chance to vote. Only a relatively small percentage choose to do so—this means your vote really counts! Some years ago the AMS did not have contested elections so the concept of a “vote” was vacuous. In my opinion it is desirable that the members have a choice and can affect the governance of the Society by registering their opinions through this choice.

The issue of an AMS Fellows Program has received much earnest discussion in the past years in various AMS committees. There are many serious and legitimate arguments for and against inaugurating such a program. Some of these arguments are set out in the well-reasoned essays by Ronald Stern and David Eisenbud in the August issue of the *Notices*. I was the chair of the committee appointed by the current AMS president, James Arthur, to formulate a specific mechanism by which an AMS Fellows Program could be initiated and function. Our goal was to construct a program that was similar to programs already functioning in other scientific societies but modified a little to reflect the democratic spirit of the AMS. We also aimed to produce a practical mechanism by which the program could be initiated and a framework for a steady state that would be fair but not too burdensome on the community. It was envisioned that in its steady state approximately 1,500 members of the AMS would be recognized by the title “AMS Fellow”. This specific proposal is now presented to you for your approval or disapproval.

If at least 2/3 of the people who vote are in favor of the proposal, the AMS will start the process of creating an AMS Society of Fellows. Only time and experience will confirm the arguments for or against joining many other scientific societies in the U.S. and honoring a group of our members by electing them “Fellow of the American Mathematical Society”. The proposal allows for a fair amount of oversight and guidance by the AMS Council and president, hence over time any Fellowship would evolve to meet the perceived interests and goals of the Society. However now is possibly the only time each member has the chance to express his/her opinion on this matter. After much discussion in committees it is my opinion that the matter should now go to the members

for their vote—and I cannot guess what the vote will be. I argued hard in the AMS Council that ultimately the members should be allowed to vote. I hope very much that you will read some of the background material about the Fellows Program Proposal and determine the outcome through your vote.

—Susan Friedlander
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Editor's Note:

The *Notices* is supported by dues paid by the members of the American Mathematical Society, who have provided access for all mathematicians throughout the world, the headline on our webpage announces. Our typical features, communications, and commentary, are generally intended for member and nonmember mathematicians alike, with member-specific information appearing in our Inside the AMS department and our From the AMS Secretary section. Susan Friedlander's Opinion column above is an exception. The *Notices* has no editorial position on the issue of AMS Fellows, of course, other than sharing Friedlander's hope that members consider it and exercise their right to vote. To help that choice be an informed one, the August *Notices* carried essays and information on the Fellows proposal assembled by Friedlander and AMS President James Arthur in place of a feature article. As we return this month to our regular format, I'd like to remind all our readers that not only do AMS members support the *Notices* as a service to the worldwide mathematical community, but that *Notices* wants to serve the membership as well.

—Andy Magid

Printing Duesberg's Statement on AIDS Bad Decision

It seems to us a bad decision of the *Notices* to print (in the framework of the Serge Lang memorial article, May 2006 issue, p. 553) a full-page statement by Peter Duesberg, who instead of talking about Serge Lang uses the opportunity to repeat his absurd, scandalous, and dangerous theory that "AIDS is not caused by HIV, but is a lifestyle epidemic." After all, this is not a mathematical theory, but just an example of the strange debates and fights Serge Lang engaged in. On the other hand, it is a prime example of an extremely dangerous "scientific" theory—which in the hands of politicians kills many people, for example in Africa.

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Idealism in Mathematics and Business

Concerning "Business Week Looks at Mathematics" (June/July 2006 *Notices*):

I have an unusual perspective, living and working in the world of a commercial weekly magazine but also being deeply connected to the mathematics community. The point made in the *Notices* piece is fundamentally correct, but also to some extent beside the point. The thrust of Steve Baker's story in *Business Week* was that the demand for mathematics in business is way up and has spread far beyond quantitative investment analysis and bioinformatics. I wish there were a way to describe meaningfully what these mathematicians actually do in these jobs in ways that are consistent with the magazine constraints of space and of not wanting to make our readers have to think very hard. I suggested some examples to Steve, but it is really, really difficult to try to explain things like data mining through lattice reduction.

Mathematicians who choose to go into commerce make a Faustian bargain. They can make a lot of money, but that pursuit of truth and beauty is going to suffer in the process. (Of course, the same has been

true for years for mathematicians who work for the NSA, without the lot of money part.)

On the whole, though, I think the increase in employment opportunities for mathematicians in industry is a wonderful thing for the profession. Any overall improvement in the employment picture will help attract good minds to mathematics and will help increase the funding for research of all sorts. And you may only have to rent your soul, not sell it. Recently I spent time at an American Regions Math League (ARML) competition for high school students, held at Penn State. ARML has gotten a great deal of assistance from the Wall Street quant firm of D. E. Shaw & Co. and its current and former employees. I doubt that there's a lot of room for idealism at Shaw or other firms of its ilk, but at least some of the mathematicians who work or have worked there managed to keep some of theirs and are helping the next generation find truth and beauty in mathematics.

—Steve Wildstrom
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Names, Second Names, Family Names, Surnames

After I completed my online registration for the International Congress of Mathematicians, 2006, Madrid, a friend of mine told me that he was having difficulty in registering because of a technical problem. The form requires First Name and Surname as mandatory, and my friend has only one name! If he uses this as the first name, the field for surname remains empty, and vice versa. Every time he tries to fill in the form he gets the message: "Some data is missing, please go back and check the information." Now, it is not uncommon to have a name consisting of only one part, in many parts of the world including Pakistan and India. To give just two examples, Riazuddin and Fayyazuddin are two very good theoretical physicists of Pakistan, and these are their whole and complete names. (Perhaps a little explanation is due here that these names appear to have only one part as written in English, but in Arabic they have two parts.) ICM is not the only place where one faces this problem; it happens in numerous

registration forms and on many other occasions, where people from the East encounter the West.

A related issue is that of second names, family names, and surnames. While in the West they all appear as the last name, there is no such practice in many other regions. In Pakistan and India, for example, the family name may appear as the first name or the middle name or the last name, or it may not appear at all, and even when it is a part of the name it does not signify what it does in the West. In China the family name is usually written first and the given name(s) second. In these three countries, the last names sometimes come from the name of the town or city in which one lived or to which the family belonged. (In the ancient Roman Empire there was also a practice of deriving the family names from place names or from different crafts.) A person from this part of the world faced this problem while he was going through health insurance procedures for his wife and children in a western country. The company refused to consider them as a family because their last names did not match. The officials, in fact, put a last name at the end of all of them to settle the issue! In situations like these the people in the West do not accept this as cultural diversity. They usually think that these people are a little ignorant, ill-mannered, and backward (perhaps not "terrorists"), and that they don't know how to name their children. Unfortunately, this urge for complete conformity and compliance on cultural issues is being propagated by some countries at the highest level and by their media. Relevant for the issue is the statement in *Caesar and Cleopatra* by George Bernard Shaw: Forgive him, for he believes that the customs of his tribe are the laws of nature!

Mathematicians should have a trivial solution to this issue: call the names as the first, middle, and last names, and require only one of them to be mandatory.

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